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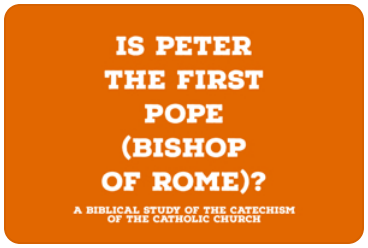
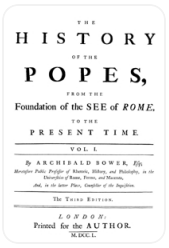
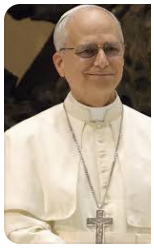
Who is the first ‘Bishop of Rome’ to whom the title of "Pope" was first ascribed in church history literature?

Reviewed 17 sources >







The earliest *extant* use of the title “papa/pope” for a Bishop of Rome in our surviving sources is commonly associated with Pope Marcellinus (bishop of Rome c. 296–304), though the evidence is late and somewhat problematic. wikipedia +2

Early usage of “papa”

Originally, *papa* (“father”) was a general term of affectionate respect used for bishops and senior clergy, not a unique title for the Roman bishop. In the East it could even be used for priests, and the earliest clearly attested “pope” in Christian literature is actually Heraclas/Heraclas of Alexandria in the 3rd century, not a Roman bishop. wikipedia +2

First Roman bishop called “pope”

Among the Bishops of Rome, later sources claim that *papa* was applied to Marcellinus (r. 296–304), and this is usually cited as the earliest recorded instance for a Roman bishop, though the documents are not contemporaneous and the record is considered problematic by historians. Because of this, some scholars and reference works avoid naming a single “first pope” in the technical sense and instead describe a gradual restriction of the term to the Roman bishop over several centuries. ncregister +4

From generic honorific to specific title

By the 4th–5th centuries the word begins to be used in a more specific way for the Bishop of

Ask a follow-up